



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony of Merrill Gay
Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Committee on Children
January 27, 2015

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Merrill Gay, I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

I am here to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program. Reach Out and Read is not just a feel-good program; it has effectively addressed a number of issues facing young children in the populations it serves.

I want to specifically note several areas where Reach Out and Read fills a need here in Connecticut:

First, there are many families who do not participate in available early learning opportunities such as early care, preschool and enrichment programs that help to prepare young children for later social and academic challenges. We don't always understand why some families are not engaging in these early learning opportunities – is it by choice, are they concerned about cost, are there language barriers, lack of outreach, etc. However, nearly every child sees their pediatrician many times throughout their first few years, and the pediatrician is a trusted ally to parents. Hearing about the importance of reading aloud and being given a book from the pediatrician is an effective delivery method that reaches those hard to reach families.

Second, basic early literacy skills like holding a book, turning pages, and pointing to pictures, are the foundations for later reading. Reach Out and Read pediatricians emphasize the importance of exposure to books, and facilitates this process with families.

Third, reading to a child is a bonding experience that cannot be understated. A child's resilience to all kinds of challenges can be directly linked to their attachment to a trusted adult. The social and emotional benefit of reading to a child is often overlooked, but given the research on adverse childhood experiences, we must do more to promote parenting skills and parent/child attachment.

For these reasons, the Alliance supports Senate Bill 209.